Chuck E. Cheese & friends keep costume firm bustling

By MARY MARTIN
Sun Staff Writer

VICTORVILLE — His work environment associates are a rat, a dog, an undefined purple animal and an Italian pizza chef who would rather be an opera singer.

That would be excitement enough for most people, but to Harold Goldbrandsen, entrepreneur, artist, sculptor, mechanical engineer and creator extraordinaire, the real excitement lies in the future.

Goldbrandsen was the founder of Fantasy Forest, a character costume business which made costumes for individuals who portrayed various characters, and for mechanical figures. Goldbrandsen's business now is a division of Pizza Time Theatre Inc., making costumes for the many characters which have been created as part of the firm's restaurant and entertainment centers.

"We are revolutionizing the character costume business," Goldbrandsen said, not the least bit immodestly.

"For the first time in the history of the character costume business, we are applying the principles of mass production," he explained.

Even though that vision is now being realized, Goldbrandsen has others.

He would like to have a day-care center in conjunction with his business operation.

"I'm really hopeful of convincing Pizza Time Theatre to incorporate the business into a daycare facility, also," he said.

There would be numerous advantages, Goldbrandsen said. First of all, there would be the obvious advantage to the employees of having their children near.

"And strictly from a selfish business standpoint, it would be more efficient and economical for us if we can attract qualified people with this resource," he added.

Beyond that, because of the nature of his business — to develop educationally sound entertainment for children — a day-care center could be used as a testing ground for new ideas, he said.

An Apple Valley School District trustee for the last 10 years, Goldbrandsen is not seeking re-election Nov. 3.

But his involvement with the educational system has convinced him of the need for and the responsibility of entertainment for children that "has to be fun, of course, but which also can be used as an educational tool.

"I would like to have an on-staff professional educator," he explained, "who would coordinate (the day-care center and testing) in conjunction with other educators."

Goldbrandsen, an advertising salesman 10 years ago, formed his costumed character business by performing in shopping centers after determining there was a viable marketplace.

He started out with a "giant yellow bunny costume" purchased from the Ice Capades for $50. "We took it down to Victor Plaza to see if it would sell balloons and the concept was very successful," Goldbrandsen said.

After that tryout, he and his partner sold the idea to a large shopping center in the Los Angeles area.

The only problem, he recalled, was that the bunny costume started smelling bad after about the fifth day.

"That's when we knew we were going to need more than one outfit," he said.

Also, he had booked six shows of Alice in Wonderland in Los Angeles area shopping centers based only on drawings of costumes and sets needed.

He discovered then that necessity is indeed the mother of invention.

Before that he had not considered the artistic aspects of the business, he said. However, he sought out the person responsible for the Disneyland characters to see if he would make him some costumes, but was informed it was impossible because of lack of time.

"He did tell me to come on down and go through his shop and he would show me how it was done," Goldbrandsen said.

"He did show me and gave me his sources for material," he continued, which was the beginning of his costume manufacturing business.

After three years and the gas crunch, the shopping center road show was not doing well financially, Goldbrandsen conceded.

That is when he sold Fantasy Forest to the Atari Co., which conceived the Pizza Time Theatre concept.

Goldbrandsen's official title with Pizza Time Theatre is director of research and development, and he is responsible for the manufacturing of the firm's stars: Chuck E. Cheese, "a very street-wise rodent"; Munch, the purple pizza eater; Jaspar T. Jowls, a country dog; and Pasquale, the Italian pizza chef.

He also has developed and manufactured mechanical characters such as a barbershop quartet and the Liverpool Beagles who perform between the theatre's live characters.

Goldbrandsen's division now completes about 18 character costumes per week for the theatre's 60-plus franchises in the United States, Canada and Australia. The first franchise for this area is scheduled to open on E Street in San Bernardino next month, and another is planned for Victorville sometime in 1982.

The obvious demands placed on Goldbrandsen's division by PizzaTime Theatre has been the springboard for investigating mass production.

Goldbrandsen has carved out of wood a proportionately accurate human body on a scale of one inch to one foot. This enables him to more efficiently design patterns, refine designs and make changes once a design has been completed.

Before, he was using a full-scale mannequin which made it very hard to design patterns abstractly, he explained.

Of course if only one or two characters were going to be made, it would be cheaper and easier to make each from a full-scale model, he said.

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Photo by Mary Martin

Gail Boucher and Debbie Barton help Pasquale (Larry Kasper) with his apron.

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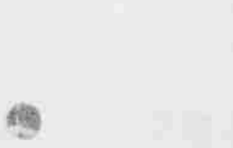

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WATCH FOR DINE IN, DINE OUT ON FRIDAY, OCTOBER 16, 1981

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